

The One Where El Steals a Dog by rosswrites

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst, But only a bit, F/M, Fluff, Mileven, Mostly Fluff, Post-Season/Series 02, but like nothing happens, eleven is a badass, mention of animal abuse, mike is a concerned boyfriend

Language: English

Characters: Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Karen Wheeler, Mike Wheeler

Relationships: Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Eleven/Mike Wheeler

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Summary:

When Mike Wheeler's heart breaks, El Hopper comes in to save the day.

Timeline: November 1985. Written on its own, but serves as a sequel to "El, Hop, a Bear, and the Vacation."

The One Where El Steals a Dog

Author's Note:

Short and sweet. All of my fics are set in the same timeline, so look for easter eggs!

All of these fics (and more, shorter and better) writing is on Tumblr @strange-thangs.

It was a warm November afternoon when Mike and El biked to the Wheeler's for dinner, their high strung backpacks seemed to rustle their hair more than the cool breeze.

Mike had already picked El up from the cabin, excitedly ranting about his mother's meatloaf and spring salad (it was all he talked about for a week).

It was Friday, just the day before the party was going to have another big D&D campaign, and, even though El was going to see him again the next day, every waking moment they could spend together was spent utterly in paradise.

Everything seemed perfect, at least until Mike noticed a sign sitting on the porch of a house just off the road.

In big black letters, the sign said "FREE PUPPY."

Now Mike had always wanted a puppy, but his parents never let him get one, for reasons he understood but throughly ignored. When the Byers had gotten their dog, Mike spent hours over their house playing with it until his mother came by to take him home. She always wondered why he'd say goodbye to the dog with more affection than he'd ever say to her.

El nearly ran into the back of Mike's bike when he abruptly stopped

in the middle of the street.

Her brow furrowed when Mike told her to wait there and he'd be back in a second. She watched inquisitively as Mike rang the doorbell and spoke to an older lady behind the door. A few seconds later Mike was holding a black and brown glob a fur in one hand and a collar and leash in the other hand.

By the time Mike made it back to his bike, El realized the small furry thing in his hands was just a tiny dog, like the one the Byers had. She also noticed how Mike couldn't stop smiling.

"The lady said he's a german shepherd. About a month old. She was gonna send him to the shelter in the morning. I didn't want him going there. Its one of those shelters that...never mind. I think I'll call him Frodo. Cus he's small, like a Hobbit. My parents will understand. They're cool."

Karen Wheeler, to El's dismay, did not understand. Karen was not cool. The shouting was terrifying enough that El thought it right to stay behind and let Mike fight this battle on his own. She wasn't going to get in between Mike and his mother, not after how kind she was to her.

"Michael Wheeler you know your father is allergic to pets," Karen shouted, standing in the doorway to house. "Even then, you cant keep your room clean, so how can I expect you to take care of a dog?"

"Mom, the lady's gonna take him to the shelter!" Mike's voice broke. "They're gonna kill him!" El could see streaks running down his face.

In that moment El was pulled back, pulled into a memory so vivid yet it seemed to only live in images. She recalled the lab, a cage, a furry cat. She remembers crying. She remembers the dark room. She remebers Mike's smile just mere minutes ago.

In that moment, El decided what she was going to do. No one was going to get hurt. Not Frodo. Not Mike.

El held Mike's hand the entire car ride back to the lady's house.

Karen wasn't taking any chances letting Mike walk the puppy back, for fear of him hiding it from her, pulling another one of his 'stunts' to get what he wanted.

Quietly, El sat in the car, watching Mike and Karen walk Frodo back to the front door of the lady's house. She couldn't hear much of the conversation, only picking up "apologize," "sorry," and "you have a big heart, kid."

The last one put a knot in El chest, one that she hated feeling more than anything in the world. Mike Wheeler was the biggest hero she knew. He always put others first. He'd found her in the rain, gave her a home, protected her. He cried every night for 353 days, hoping she was safe and warm. That's what El loved about Mike. His kindness was something she longed to reciprocate. He gave but rarely received. He'd say *El, you don't have to get me anything. Having you home is the greatest gift I've ever received.* Sure, El would be as kind as she could to Mike, but nothing ever seemed to live up to what he did for her.

By the time Mike got back in the car, El noticed that his eyes were red and puffy. She could tell he was trying to hide his face from her. But she could see how broken he was. She always could.

"Mike..." El reached out to Mike, and put her hand on his knee.

"It was a stupid idea in the first place." Mike smiled at her, seemingly trying to act like the streaks of tears on his face didn't exist. He turned his head and stared longingly out the window, making that face El had grown accustomed to. She'd memorized it during those nightly trips to his blanket fort, watching him from miles and miles away.

They didn't talk the rest of the ride home, but rather just sat, his hand unconsciously holding hers.

After what seemed like the most depressing dinner El had ever experienced (she would rather have ate a tv dinner in silence with Hopper: Mike side-eyed his mother every few seconds, Ted Wheeler acted more confused than he did first meeting El, Nancy left early to go see a movie with either Steve or Jonathan [El still couldn't figure out which one Nancy was seeing, because she was always around both], and Holly screamed when Karen wouldn't give her ice cream before the meatloaf), El began preparing to leave for home.

She had a scheme in mind; she was going to be *kind*. Yet Mike-*I can't let anything bad happen to my girlfriend*-Wheeler always had a way of nearly ruining her plans, just like all the times he tried to stoped her from doing something nice for him.

"You ready, El?" Mike said as he went to put on his shoes. Mike thought he was taking El home. *Of course*.

"Mike," El said, looking him dead in the eyes. "I can take care of myself."

She was being kind, in her own way. Mike wouldn't have to go all the way out to the cabin just to come back home. She'd be saving him all that time and energy. Yet she knew Mike would just spend all that saved energy worrying about her safely getting home. *Halfway happy*, she thought.

"El I canmbmb mmbbthbmb..." Mike's face went red and his eyes grew wide. He couldn't move his lips. El brought her sleeve to her nose and wiped the blood away. She smiled as he gasped for air, a slight giggle escaping from her nose. "Hey! Not fair!"

El was already out the door by the time Mike processed the situation. She was getting on her bike when she heard Mike run down the stairs. She was about to take off when she felt him grab the bike.

“Can we at least say goodbye?” Mike’s voice was shaky, as he was never one for endings.

El noticed his hand let go of the handlebars and saw in his eyes something that said *please just don’t leave me hanging*. They always ended their time together with hugs and kisses. El was having none of that tonight.

“No goodbyes,” El said flatly. She hated goodbyes.

“But...”

“You’ll pick me up tomorrow.” El started to get herself situated on the bike again. She didn’t look at Mike, but rather had her attention focused on the road ahead. She started to pedal forward, leaving Mike behind her. Then she heard a shout.

“Hey El-” Mike’s voice cracked as he yelled. He wanted to tell her something, something important, but her shouts interrupted him

“Love you too, Mike,” El called out to him, not even turning as she said it. Loving Mike was as natural as breathing. She pedaled into the darkness away from the glow of the Wheeler’s porch light. She knew exactly where she was going.

It took a shorter amount of time than she expected, but when she arrived at the lady’s house, the darkness inside made El breathe harder.

The sign that read “FREE PUPPY” was gone, leaving the lady’s porch barren and cold, the front door obviously locked, but that didn’t phase her. Hopper told her something about “breaking and entering” before, mentioning it when he talked about his case files that he always brought home from work. *This wasn’t a crime*, El thought. *I’m saving Frodo.*

El stood at the front door, and, with a tilt of her head, she heard the

sliding of the chain lock. The front door creaked as it slowly opened. She could see Frodo right in front of her. He was locked in a cage far too small for him. He was asleep, his head resting on crumpled newspapers. As El stepped in the sound of snoring froze her in her tracks. She turned her head to see the outline of the lady who had given Frodo to Mike. El had to think fast. Not two seconds later a wool blanket floated across the room and rested over the lady's face. El thought that maybe it would subdue the sound.

Creeping forward, El grabbed the collar and leash from atop the small cage and gently opened it. Inside, Frodo perked up, his ears wiggling even though El was as quiet as she could possibly be. She noticed his tail wag when she reached in to pick him up.

She didn't bother to close the cage behind her.

She made her way out the door, shut it, and locked it with her mind. With Frodo now trying to lick the blood from her nose, El smiled and hugged him tighter than she probably should have. She didn't get to touch him when Mike brought him home, so, being close to this ball of fur felt like love at first touch.

"We're going home. You'll be safe." El kissed the top of his head, just like Mike did for her. El bent down on her knee and took off her backpack. She carefully put the collar and leash in first, Frodo just after. The wiggle on her back brought a smile to her face as she mounted her bike and took off, the cabin not too far.

When El closed the door to the cabin, Hopper was already at the kitchen table, late night coffee steaming, case files spread out.

"Hey kid, how was the Wheeler's?" Hopper looked at El with a smile. He knew she loved being there. Karen's food was always better than his cooking. Hopper also knew that 90% of the reason El went to the Wheeler's was to spend time with Mike. Something was off, he noticed, when El didn't respond. She had an intensity in her eyes that

he rarely saw.

El sat down on the floor right between the table and the sofa. This wasn't normal. Hopper perked up and closed the open file in front of him. The coffee cup made a subtle knock on the table when he set it down. El pulled the backpack off and carefully set it in front of her. When she unzipped it, Frodo crept out. Hopper's face went white.

"El what did we talk about? We're taking it to the shelter." Hopper stood up, his arms folded in front. El knew Hopper wasn't going to be happy. He never liked it when she brought animals home. Their fight after the bear cub incident resulted in neither of them speaking for two days.

"The shelter will kill him. Frodo stays here." El kept her eyes on the puppy as it curled into her lap. She was never letting this dog go.

"El, kid, come on." El noticed Hopper's voice changing. He wasn't angry. He was tired.

"No."

"Kid..." Hopper's eyes grew tighter when he noticed blood coming from El's nose. She was looking at something behind him. He turned around to see his still steaming cup of coffee floating ever so high above the large stack of files on the table. El got what she wanted. She always had a way.

"Frodo stays safe." El was trying to hide the tears growing in her eyes. Her stern face subdued by her quivering lip. She kept one hand on Frodo's back, petting him and keeping him warm.

"Ok, fine. You'll take care of him, feed him, walk him, clean up when he shits on the floor? Promise?" Hopper looked at her like he did the night of the Snow Ball. He gave her new 'not stupid' rules.

"Promise." El was going to protect Frodo like Mike protected her. If Mike couldn't save Frodo, El would. It was her turn to be kind.

"Can I at least ask where you found uh Frodo?"

"No." When El retreated to single word sentences, Hopper knew the

topic hit her hard. He wasn't going to push any further. He loved seeing her happy. And this puppy would take her mind off Mike Wheeler, even though they saw each other every day at school. He knew El was going to keep her word. She never broke a promise.

When Mike stood at the door to the Hopper's cabin early in the morning Saturday, he expected Hopper to be the one to greet him at the door. His breath was knocked out of him, however, when El appeared behind the door, wrapping her arms around his chest, squeezing him tightly.

"I want to show you something," El said, pulling out of their hug. She grabbed his hand and pulled him into the cabin. "Mike, meet our new dog, Frodo."

Mike's jaw nearly hit the floor when his eyes fell on the huge, terrifying chief of police, sprawled on his stomach, tugging a rope in which the other end was in the mouth of a small dog. Mike had never seen Hopper this happy.

"El...how did..." The smile on Mike's face hurt. He couldn't contain his happiness. He thought the dog was gone, like he couldn't save it. His thoughts were interrupted by a hug from behind. He felt El's curls press into his back.

"You can't always be the hero, Mike Wheeler."

Author's Note:

Thanks for reading! I'd love to hear your thoughts and opinions!